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HAMLET'S BRIDES.



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Hamlet's Brides

A Shakespearian Burlesque in One Act

By SARA HAWKS STERLING

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Hamlet's Brides

CHARACTERS

HAMLET, *a princely widower.*

PORTIA, *a haughty lawyer.*

ROSALIND, *a bicycling girl.*

JULIET, *a flirtatious widow.*

BEATRICE, *an up-to-date damsel.*

VIOLA, *a timid dove.*

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COSTUMES

The burlesque may be given in modern costume, HAMLET wearing a dress-suit, and ROSALIND, a bicycling skirt and jacket. It will be more effective, however, if the characters are dressed as follows :

HAMLET. Black tights and doublet, black cloak, sword.

PORTIA. Red or black lawyer cap and gown.

ROSALIND. A modern bicycling suit.

JULIET. A white dress, of some thin, clinging material.

BEATRICE. Richly-colored silk or satin court-dress.

VIOLA. Pale green or pink dress, thin and clinging to figure.

PROPERTIES

Doyly, work-basket, and embroidering materials for VIOLA. Book, watch, and if possible, a lorgnette, for PORTIA. Large handkerchief for HAMLET. Two small handkerchiefs for ROSALIND. A moon of pasteboard and gilt paper for JULIET. Large book to represent hotel register. Table and chairs, arranged as the action requires.

NOTE.—If HAMLET speaks with a lisp throughout, the part will be still more effective.



Hamlet's Brides.

SCENE.—*An ordinary parlor, entrances R. and L. Sofa at back, L. C. Table down R. with a large book upon it. Several chairs. Other furniture and decorations as space permits. PORTIA and VIOLA discovered seated, PORTIA reading at table R. C. VIOLA embroidering L. C. To them enters JULIET from R., running down C.*

JULIET. Say, girls, have you heard the news?

(*VIOLA jumps, PORTIA closes her book majestically.*)

PORTIA. I do wish, Juliet, that if there is any news, you would not announce the fact in so startling a manner!

VIOLA (*patting her side distractedly*). Yes, so do I. You scared me so, that my heart is thumping yet.

JULIET. Oh, bother, Viola, you're always talking about your heart. I got over hearts long ago. But, oh! the news. Where are the others? Here comes Rosalind, and Beatrice is with her, raging as usual!

Enter BEATRICE and ROSALIND, L.

BEATRICE. Well, I should just like to see a man have the effrontery to make love to me again!

ROSALIND. No doubt you'd like to see it, dear, but you never will. You've fallen off dreadfully of late. And even if any one should be bold enough to attempt it, you couldn't manage matters any better than when you trapped poor Benedict.

(*They look angrily at each other. JULIET comes between them.*)

JULIET. Do stop fighting, girls, and listen. I've a piece of news.

PORTIA. Pray tell us that wonderful piece of news.

JULIET. Then listen, every one! (*They gather about her.*)
A man has arrived at the hotel!

ALL (*except JULIET, in a tone of disgust*). Oh! (*They turn away from her.*)

JULIET. Why, what's the matter? I thought you'd be pleased.

PORTIA (*crushingly*). Pleased! When we have each of us come to Salt Lake City, fresh from dissolving the odious bonds that marriage laid upon us? Pleased! When the mere sight of a man is a source of disgust to—well, to most of us, Mrs. Montague!

(*All except JULIET make nods and gestures of approval during PORTIA'S speech.*)

JULIET (*injured*). Oh, well, if you feel that way, of course there's no more to be said.

(*VIOLA begins to sob, wiping her eyes on her doily.*)

BEATRICE. Why is that infant crying?

VIOLA. I'm thinking of my Orsy. Oh, Orsy, Orsy! (*Sobs.*)

ROSALIND. Orsy! Who's Orsy!

PORTIA. Orsino. Her husband, you know.

VIOLA (*sobbing at intervals*). Yes, he said that his marrying me was an awful mistake! You remember that he wished to see me in my woman's weeds. When I wore them, he didn't like my appearance a bit. Then I put on doublet and hose again, just to please him, whereupon he said I was a New Woman, and would be riding a bicycle next; and that nearly broke my heart! (*Sobs.*)

ROSALIND. Pshaw! Your mistake was in consenting to lay off your emblems of superiority. Now I never did. From the time Orly first made love to me, I always wore the breeches! He's left me now.

VIOLA. Oh, did he die?

ROSALIND. Die? No. He's gone into an insane asylum. The doctors—horrid wretches!—said it was my tongue that drove him mad.

BEATRICE. As for me, I was glad to get rid of my Benny. He was always so rude to me! I wanted to do the most talking, of course, and that didn't suit him at all, selfish creature! Such a long tongue as that man had! At last, in desperation, I said, "Let's have a divorce." He had the impudence to reply, "With pleasure, my dear Lady Disdain." So we parted by mutual consent. I never want to see a horrid man again!

JULIET. Oh, don't you? I'm sure I was awfully fond of my poor, dear Romeo; but I wouldn't mind at all having another lover, and marrying again. He was so foolish to take that poison, especially when that old dear, Friar Lawrence, had everything arranged so nicely. Well, anyway, I'm glad I didn't kill myself, as I intended. It would have been so uncomfortable, you know.

PORTIA. Yes, how was it you didn't? I saw the account of both your death and Romeo's, headed "Tragedy in High Life," in all the morning papers.

JULIET. Why, you know, I tried to stab myself with Romeo's dagger. The poor dear fellow was so hard up that it hadn't been sharpened for an age. Consequently, it was so dull that it didn't stick me at all. Of course, however, my grief and excitement caused me to remain in a dead faint for a long while. When I recovered, I came right straight off here.

PORTIA. I, too, have had my matrimonial trials. As you know, I am a lawyer, and have always been fond of intellectual pursuits. Bassy, I regret to say, knew not the joys of either law or intellect. This fact was the first little rift within the lute, and it kept growing wider and wider until at last we parted. It was on the question of women riding diamond frames that we finally agreed to differ. He said I should never ride one. I said I would. Enough! We parted, and I console myself with intellectual pursuits. I must go now (*looking at her watch*), for I have an article to read in a scientific magazine on "The Theosophic Philology of Protoplasm."

[Exit R.]

BEATRICE. I want to look up the account of the latest divorce suit. Oh, how I love 'em!

[Exit L.]

VIOLA. I need some silk from my room to finish this doily. Oh, how prettily I used to talk to Orsy about concealment preying like a worm i' the bud on damask cheek; but now I work the buds on damask doylies!

[Exit R.]

(JULIET runs to entrances at R. and L. and looks out cautiously, then carefully examines the room, and finally approaches ROSALIND, L. C.)

JULIET. Nobody around except us! Rosalind?

ROSALIND. Well?

JULIET (*insinuatingly*). Would you object very much to seeing a man again?

ROSALIND. No. To tell you the truth, I'd rather enjoy

it, although it was no use saying so while the others were around.

JULIET. Hurrah! I agree with you! Let's try to have some fun with this man. It's *so* dull here. Really, the moonlight is lovely, and it is perfectly wasted when there is no one swearing by the moon, and longing to be a glove upon your hand so as to kiss your cheek, and all that sort of thing.

ROSALIND. And it is always so much more fun to tease a man than a girl. I think girls are stupid. Do you know the new arrival's name?

JULIET. Let's look at the register. Here it is on the table. (*They both bend over the book on the table.*) Oh, Rosy, he's a prince! What do you think of that? He's from Denmark, the cold, cold north! I wonder if he knows how to make love.

ROSALIND. We'll see. What's his name? H-a-m, ham! Ham, how funny! Oh, no, here's some more; H-a-m-l-e-t, Hamlet. Yes, he's a prince. Have you seen him? Perhaps he has come to marry an American heiress.

JULIET. Seen him? Yes, indeed, I have. He looks so sweetly romantic and melancholy. Goodness, Rosy, here he is.

(*They nudge each other, and ROSALIND whispers to JULIET.*

JULIET *nods and laughs, and then begins to rush about the stage wildly.*)

ROSALIND (*following her madly*). What is it? What is it?

Enter HAMLET, R., slowly.

JULIET. Ow, ow! Catch it, Rosy, catch it! (*Slapping at her face.*)

ROSALIND. Oh, I can't! (*Waving her hands at her wildly.*)

HAMLET (*speaking with a lisp, and looking mildly astonished*). Rest, rest, perturbed spirits, rest!

ROSALIND (*pausing an instant*). It is all very well for you to stand there and speak calmly about our "*rehting*," but it would be much more to the purpose if you'd kill this horrid mosquito. Oh, Juliet, I believe it's on me now! (*They both rush about again.*)

HAMLET. I own the soft impeachment. Allow me! (*He follows ROSALIND R. C., where she pauses. JULIET stops L. C., HAMLET C.*) Allow me! (*He slaps ROSALIND'S cheek.*) Now, have I done it, pat!

JULIET (*pulling one made of pasteboard and gilt paper from the folds of her dress*). Here! (*Aside.*) I brought it for the occasion. A love-scene is nothing without a moon!

HAMLET. I swear by my sword!

JULIET. Oh, horrors, no! By the moon!

HAMLET (*resignedly*). Very well, by the moon!

JULIET. All right, that's done! Now go to Beatrice, quick. (*Aside.*) She's treated me fairly, so I'll give her a chance to flirt a little.

HAMLET (*as he crosses to BEATRICE*). I might as well have 'em both. I've proposed to two others, and will have to run away, anyhow.

BEATRICE (*as he reaches her*). Oh, have you come back to me?

HAMLET. I love you, Beatrice.

BEATRICE. Can this be true?

HAMLET (*for the third time repeating the handkerchief business used first in scene with VIOLA*). That I love thee best, oh, most best, believe it! (*Aside, as he picks up handkerchief.*) I might as well say it to the other one, and be done with it. (*Returns to JULIET, and repeats handkerchief business for the fourth time.*) That I love thee best, oh, most best, believe it!

(*While HAMLET is on his knees to JULIET, enter PORTIA, hurriedly, R. She comes down C., and seizes him by the throat, before he has time to rise.*)

PORTIA. Murderer!!!

(*BEATRICE and JULIET rise hastily, and come on each side of HAMLET and PORTIA.*)

BEATRICE. Be careful, Portia.

JULIET. Don't be so rough!

PORTIA (*excitedly to HAMLET*). Matricide, unclicide, would-be suicide, at last I have thee! (*Fiercely to BEATRICE and JULIET.*) Hence, and let me deal with him! Hence, I say!

BEATRICE. We'll go for help.

JULIET. Isn't she a vixen?

[*Exeunt BEATRICE and JULIET, L.*

HAMLET (*rolling his eyes abjectly upward to PORTIA*). Are you a lawyer?

PORTIA (*keeping firm hold of his collar*). Yes! I take pride in saying, yes!

HAMLET (*beseechingly*). Then save me! What shall I do?

I have proposed to four girls in one evening. How am I to get out of it? Oh, help me!

PORTIA. That problem is easily solved. You are in Salt Lake City.

HAMLET. What difference does that make?

PORTIA. All the difference in the world. Just turn Mormon, and marry every one!

HAMLET. Is it so? Oh, my deliverer! Am I allowed only four?

PORTIA. Oh, no! You may marry an infinite number!

HAMLET. Then, if you will kindly remove your lovely, lily-white hand from my unworthy neck, and allow me to rise from this very ungraceful position, I have a proposition to lay before you, oh, my deliverer!

(PORTIA releases him. He rises, and both exit, R.)

Enter VIOLA and ROSALIND, L.

VIOLA (*sobbing*). I'll never let a man propose to me again. Oh, the traitor!

ROSALIND. Yes, he is. (*Aside.*) I'm so furious that that whining baby got ahead of me! Well, I had him on my wheel before he spoke to anybody else, so now!

(They come down stage. VIOLA seats herself at table, and begins to embroider. Reënter PORTIA and HAMLET, R.)

HAMLET. So you, too, will be my bride, oh, my deliverer?

PORTIA. Yes, I consent to your proposal.

(They come down c. together.)

HAMLET (*repeating handkerchief business for the fifth time*). That I love thee best, oh, most best, believe it! (*Rising.*) Where are my other brides?

ROSALIND. Your other brides! What do you mean?

Enter BEATRICE and JULIET, L.

HAMLET. Are we not in Salt Lake City? Are we not under the heavenly shadow of Mormonism? Oh, blessed, blessed Brigham Young! "Oh, my Viola, come to my arms! Oh, my Beatrice, oh, my Rosalind, oh, my Juliet, oh, my Portia, here to my heart! (*Standing c., he spreads out his arms. VIOLA falls on his neck. BEATRICE and ROSALIND are encircled by one arm, JULIET and PORTIA by the other.*) How I wish Ophelia had lived to see this day. Then I might have

had six wives instead of only five ! Let us hence to the Temple, then, my darlings, and we six shall be made one. That I love each one best, oh, most best, believe it !

(The five girls join hands in a ring and dance around HAMLET, singing as follows, to the air of "Oh, My Darling Clementine," or other popular air, while HAMLET stands in the middle, smiling at them seraphically :)

"To the Temple we will hurry,
To the Temple, let us go !
Hamlet's brides are his forever ;
For not one could tell him, No !"

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ACT II.—The Union camp. The spy. The fortune of war. A secret move. In a tight place. Ladies in camp. Cornered. The dispatches. The capture. FACE TO FACE.

ACT III.—The court-martial. The weight of evidence. Self-betrayed. Alabama Joe, the scout. A life at stake. The whole truth. The tie of blood. A brother's testimony. The prisoner's defence. "I am guilty." The fate of a spy. DEATH.

ACT IV.—The prison cell. Alone with death. A surprise. True love. A chance of escape. A strange promise. Brothers and rivals. The trap. "The underground route." An impossible condition. "Then die like a dog." An interruption. Changing guard. "Now is your time." "I love my country, but you are still my brother." THE ESCAPE.

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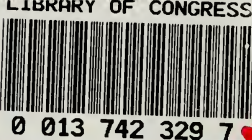
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